

ALL ABOUT THE

# ATF



An activity book

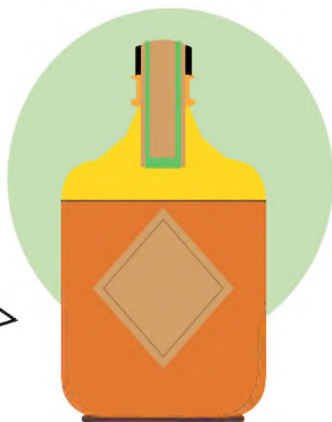
# Who's who?

Most of the people in the ATF's history aren't considered important enough to get wider attention. But that doesn't mean they aren't still interesting.



I'm Izzy Einstein. Don't tell nobody though, I'm in disguise. I was one of the most successful agents of the Bureau of Prohibition. I met Albert Einstein once!

I'm alcohol. I was illegal to sell in America for thirteen years! I was illegal to sell in Mississippi until 1966! But Americans love me, always have and always will!



I'm Stephen Higgins. I worked at the ATF for 30 years, and was the director of the ATF from 1983-1993. I had the great idea that a high profile raid would be just the thing to take the ATF into the big leagues.

I'm firearm! I killed almost 50,000 Americans last year and the ATF can't (or won't) do shit to stop me!



# **The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco Firearms, and Explosives.**

The ATF is saddled with the unfortunate task of regulating those things that Americans love most. Unlike the previously mentioned agencies, the ATF serves a dual purpose, both as a law enforcement agency and a regulatory body.

Even before the formal creation of the ATF, the government has wanted to tax alcohol. The Treasury department has had an agency for the purpose of collecting taxes and enforcing alcohol regulations since 1862 (when the alcohol tax was used to fund the Civil War).

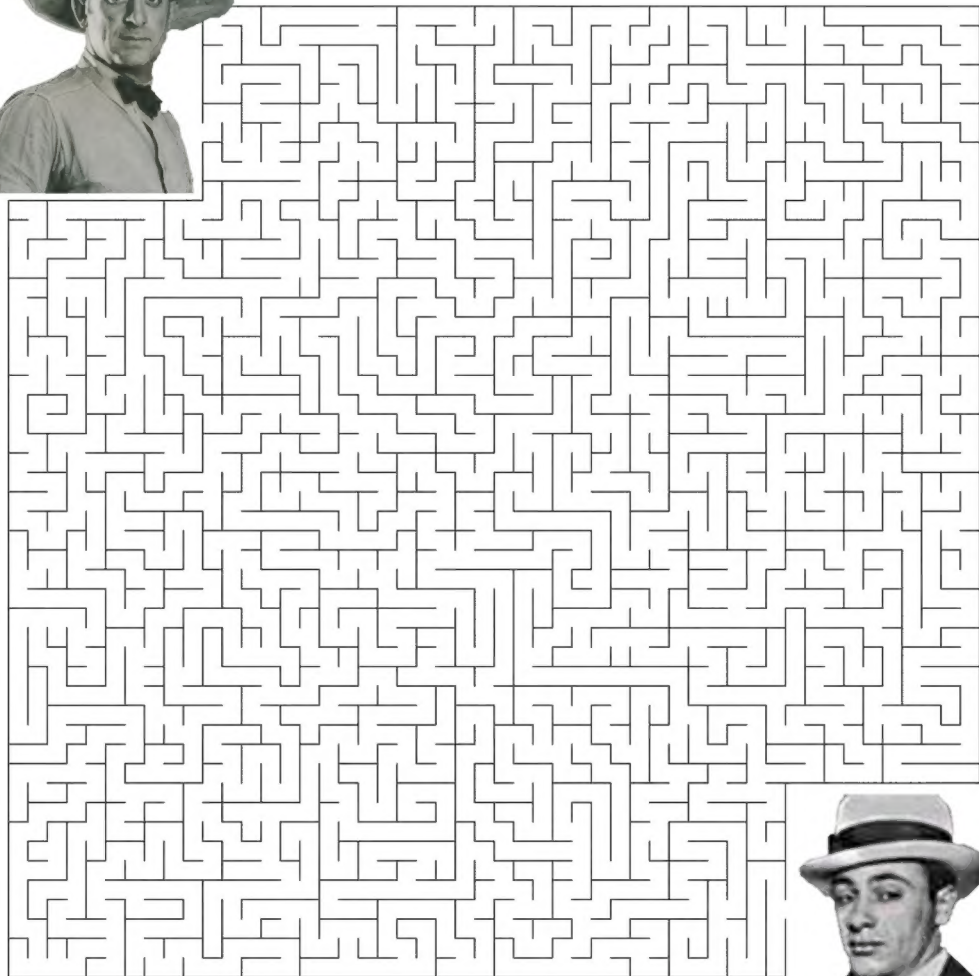
During Prohibition, the agency was given many more resources and elevated to a unit and then a Bureau. And after Prohibition, when the department was downsized, they were still tasked with enforcement and tax collection. Several high profile assassinations with poorly regulated guns led to the creation of the ATF in 1972, fusing together the history of law enforcement capabilities with the tax and regulatory abilities to limit the spread of guns.

Several high profile mishandlings at Waco and Ruby Ridge thrust the ATF into the spotlight, and to this day the right is intent on abolishing the ATF, which they see as a flagrant example of the government's ability to infringe on Second Amendment rights.

# Prohibition

In 1918, the newly created Prohibition Unit of the Treasury was tasked with enforcing the ban on sale of alcoholic beverages.

Can you help the intrepid Prohibition agent Richard James "Two Gun" Hart track the dastardly bootlegger Frank Capone and bring them to justice?



## Did you know?

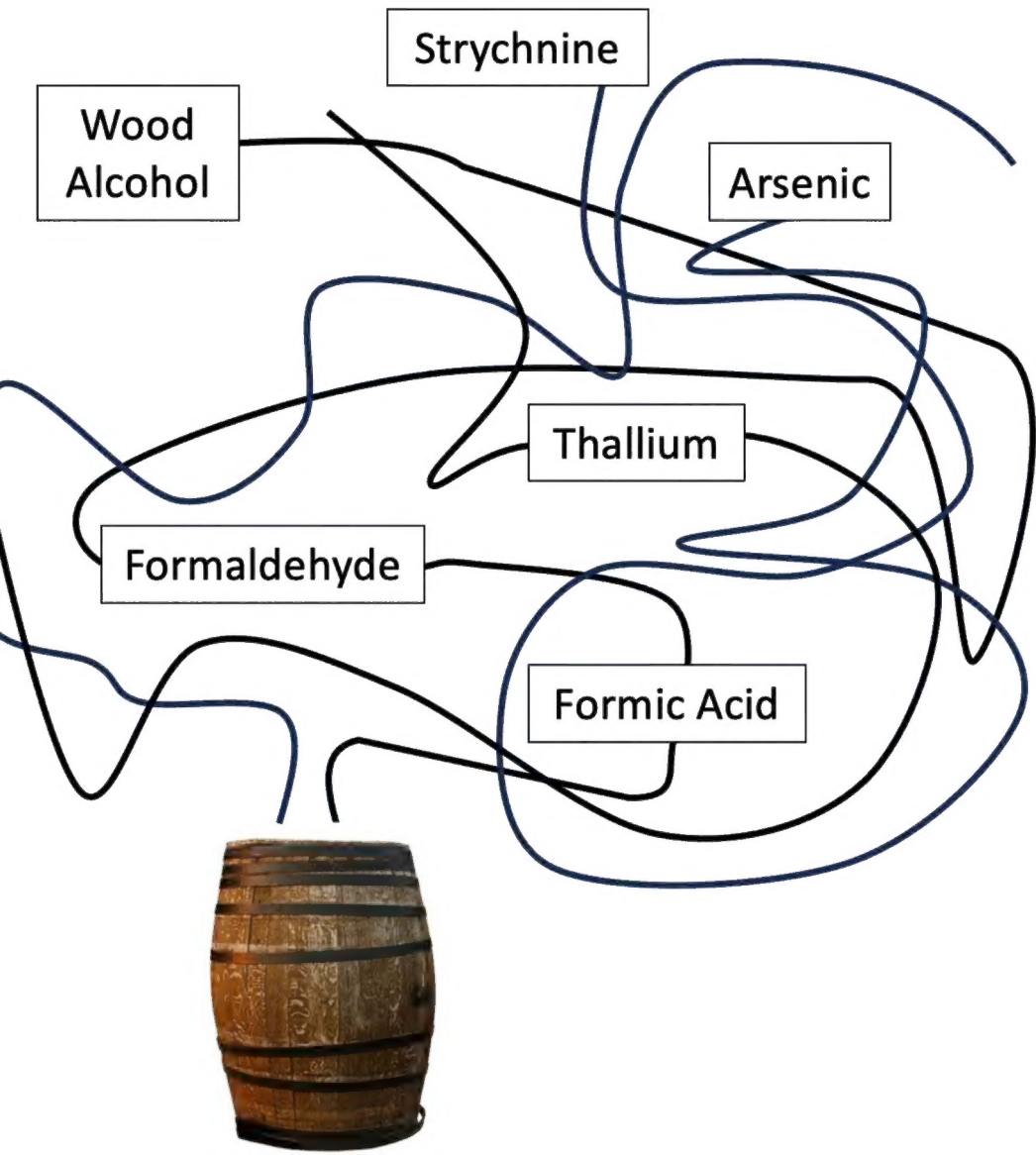
Hart was born James Vincenzo Capone, and was the older brother of the bootleggers Frank, Ralph and Alphonse "Al" Capone



# Alcohol Tainting

If banning alcohol doesn't work, you can always try poison! In 1926 the US Government began tainting alcohol to disincentivize drinking. This program continued until the end of prohibition in 1933, killing and blinding more than 10,000 people.

Can you trace the chemical origin of the poison the government used?



# The Untouchables

Eliot Ness made his name as the leader of the Untouchables, a famously incorruptible group of Prohibition Agents who revolutionized modern policing and helped bring down Al Capone. Or, Ness was a minor, self-aggrandizing public figure who was useful to the Bureau.

Can you guess whether the below statements are true or false?

There were only ten Untouchables throughout the whole Prohibition era

Eliot Ness and J Edgar Hoover hated each other

Ness was the inspiration for Dick Tracy

The Untouchables arrested Al Capone

Ness's method for assembling a team revolutionized modern policework

Ness was only 26 when he started as a Prohibition Agent

The squad included a graduate of the Carlisle Indian School, and an agent nicknamed "Mr. Alcohol Tax"

After retiring from the Bureau, Ness never touched a drop of alcohol.

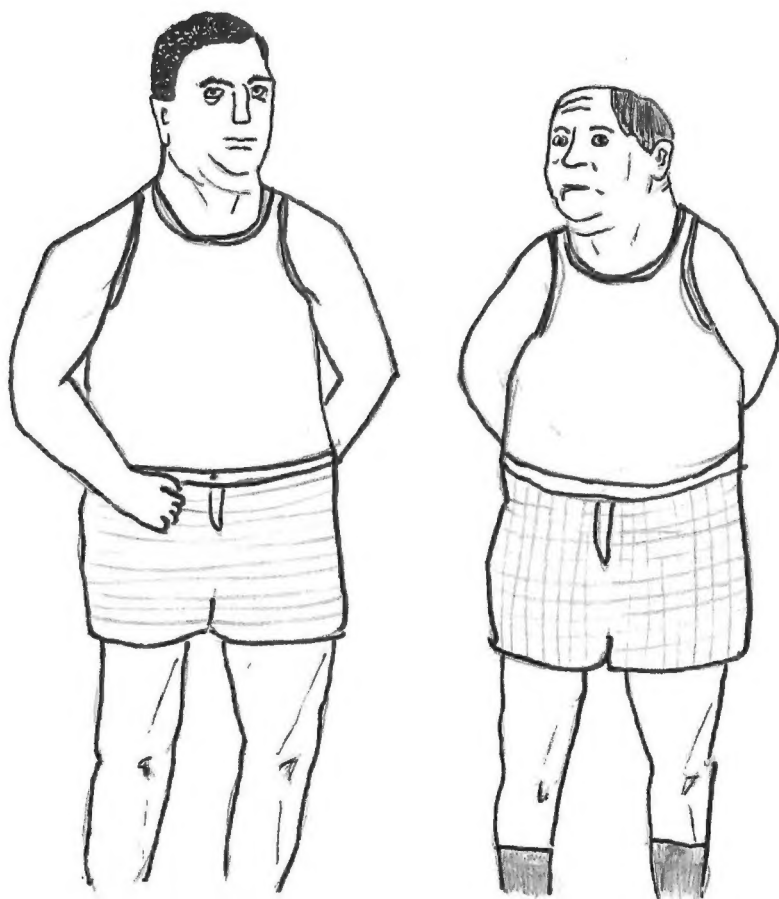
## Did you know?

After leaving the Bureau, Ness failed to capture the Cleveland Torso Murderer, despite burning down a shantytown and displacing 300 people to try and uncover evidence.

# The Bureau's Greatest Agents

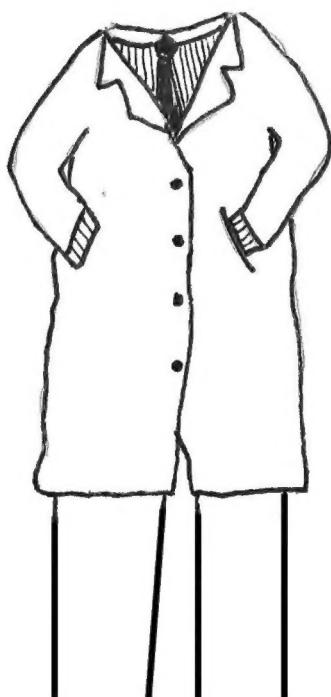
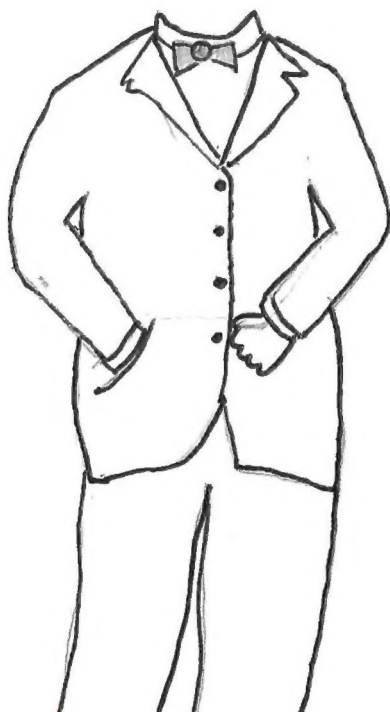
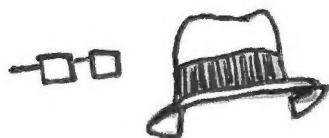
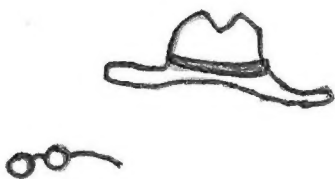
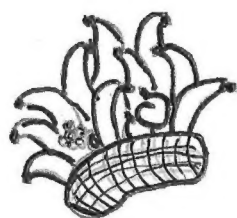
Two of the most colorful agents of the Prohibition Unit were Isidor "Izzy" Einstein and Moe W. Smith, confiscating more than 5 million bottles of booze and making more than 4000 arrests (with a 95% conviction rate) during their careers, despite being personally ambivalent to the whole business of Prohibition. The pair spoke more than six languages, and their antics spread throughout the national papers, in part because of their use of disguises. Turn to the back to read about some of their most sensational.

Can you use the costumes on the following pages to disguise the dynamic duo and befuddle the bootleggers?

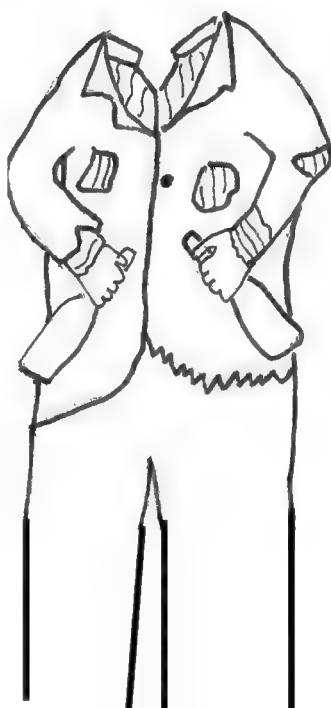
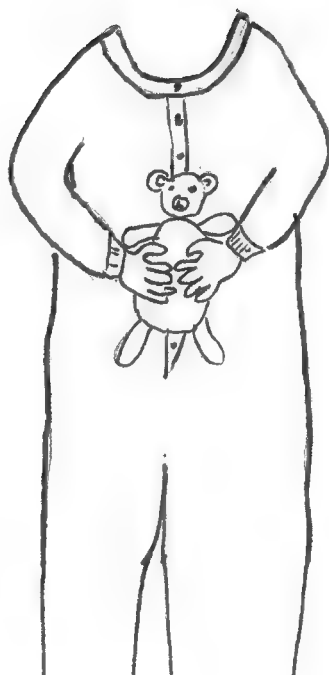
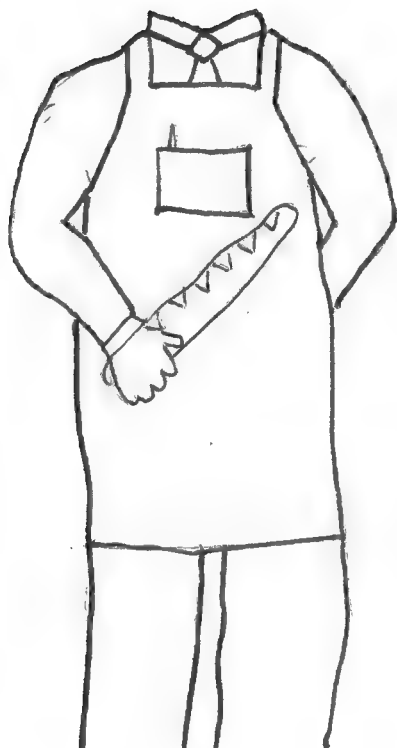




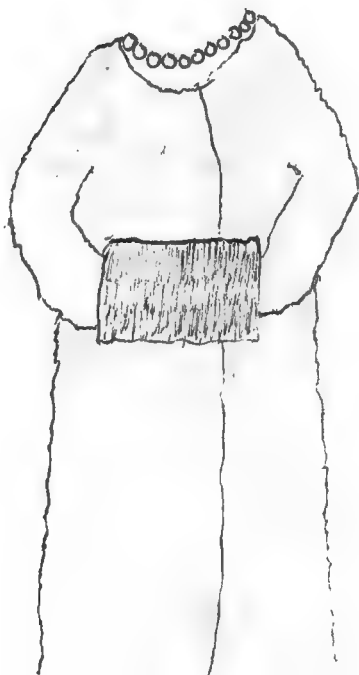
















# Operation Trojan Horse

Similar to Ruby Ridge, the 1993 siege of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco was also an ATF operation. The Branch Davidians had been buying semi-automatic weapons and modifying them and selling them for a large profit.

Can you find the weapons the Davidians had? (the number of each follows in parentheses)

I M N S I K B K V Y S S Y L Z  
P Y C S R G N V U E Y A L A M  
O S A Y K E R W L N P O U A B  
A X V A K R C F R H J T V I E  
N S O R V E I N G S O Y F V S  
L U O I G R V F E M L V L F M  
H A N D G U N S A L V K O H I  
S C I T A M O T U A I M E S U  
F L T N I X I I C A J S P E C  
J S Y A T C A N W G E X I D Y  
G M B P S K S F W P I D B A R  
U I Y K J Z G R R M C B F N O  
F G M N X G O E Z V Z B S E W  
X G V A D B D C N U B W R R T  
V E N R J E O D J P F J S G A

Automatics (46)

Grenades (4)

Handguns (68)

Rifles (181)

Semiautomatics (46)

Silencers (21)

## Did you know?

The ATF director felt that a high profile raid against the Davidians would help the agency secure more funding in the next month's federal budgeting session

# Where in the Government is the ATF?

Throughout its history, the ATF (and its predecessors) have been positioned throughout the government. Can you connect the pins to put together the history of the ATF?

The Office of Internal Revenue is created as a part of the Treasury


The Bureau of Prohibition is moved to the Department of Justice and its focus expanded to fighting violent crime

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) is created under the Treasury department


The 21st Amendment repeals Prohibition. The Bureau is moved back to the Treasury and renamed the Alcohol Tax Unit (ATU)

The newly created Prohibition Unit within the Treasury is tasked with enforcing Prohibition


The ATU's scope is expanded to include enforcement of firearm regulation




After several high profile gun assassinations including JFK, the ATU is granted wider regulatory authority over firearms and reorganized into the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Division (ATTD)




The Prohibition Unit becomes the Bureau of Prohibition



The Bureau faces increasing scrutiny after the public mishandling of the Ruby Ridge standoff and Waco siege



Timothy McVeigh seeks revenge on the ATF in the Oklahoma City bombing.



After 9/11, the ATF is split into two, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms is moved to the Justice Department, and the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau remains in the Treasury

# Ruby Ridge

Though the FBI's role in the standoff and siege have dominated popular memory, Ruby Ridge began as an ATF operation. Randy Weaver was initially charged with selling sawed off shotguns to an ATF informant, and then failed to appear in court for the related charges.

Under federal law, it's illegal to alter a shotgun barrel shorter than 18 inches. Can you take a pair of scissors and cut these shotguns down to an illegal length?



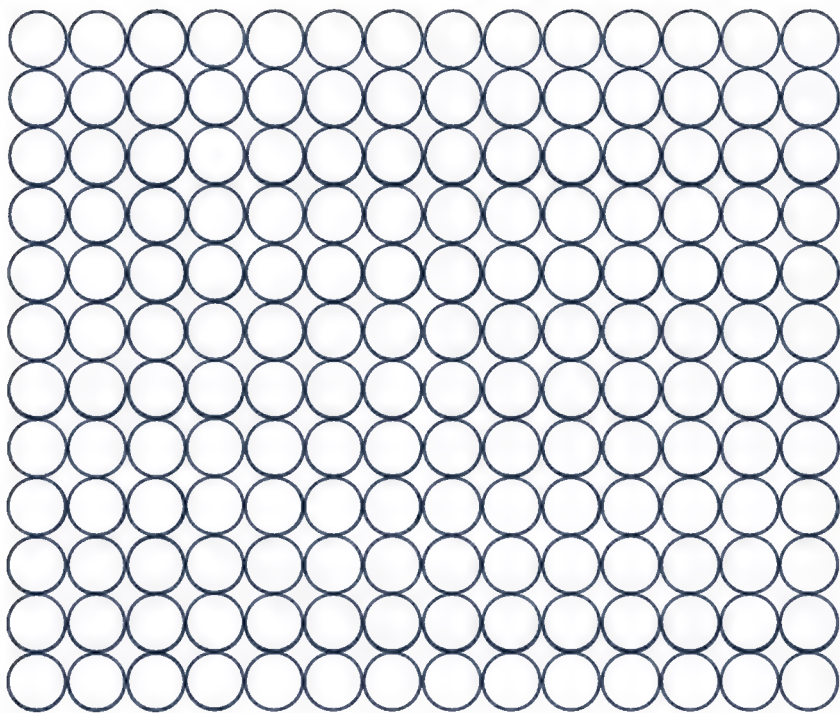


# Oklahoma City Bombing

In 1995, on the second anniversary of the end of the Waco siege, white supremacist Timothy McVeigh detonated a truck bomb outside of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City, which contained, among other things, the ATF regional headquarters and a day care center.

McVeigh sought revenge for Waco and Ruby Ridge and wanted to attack what he saw as government overreach, particularly the ATF. He publicly published letters in his own name calling for violence, and distributed pamphlets with the personal address of Lon Horiuchi. Despite this, he was never surveilled by the FBI.

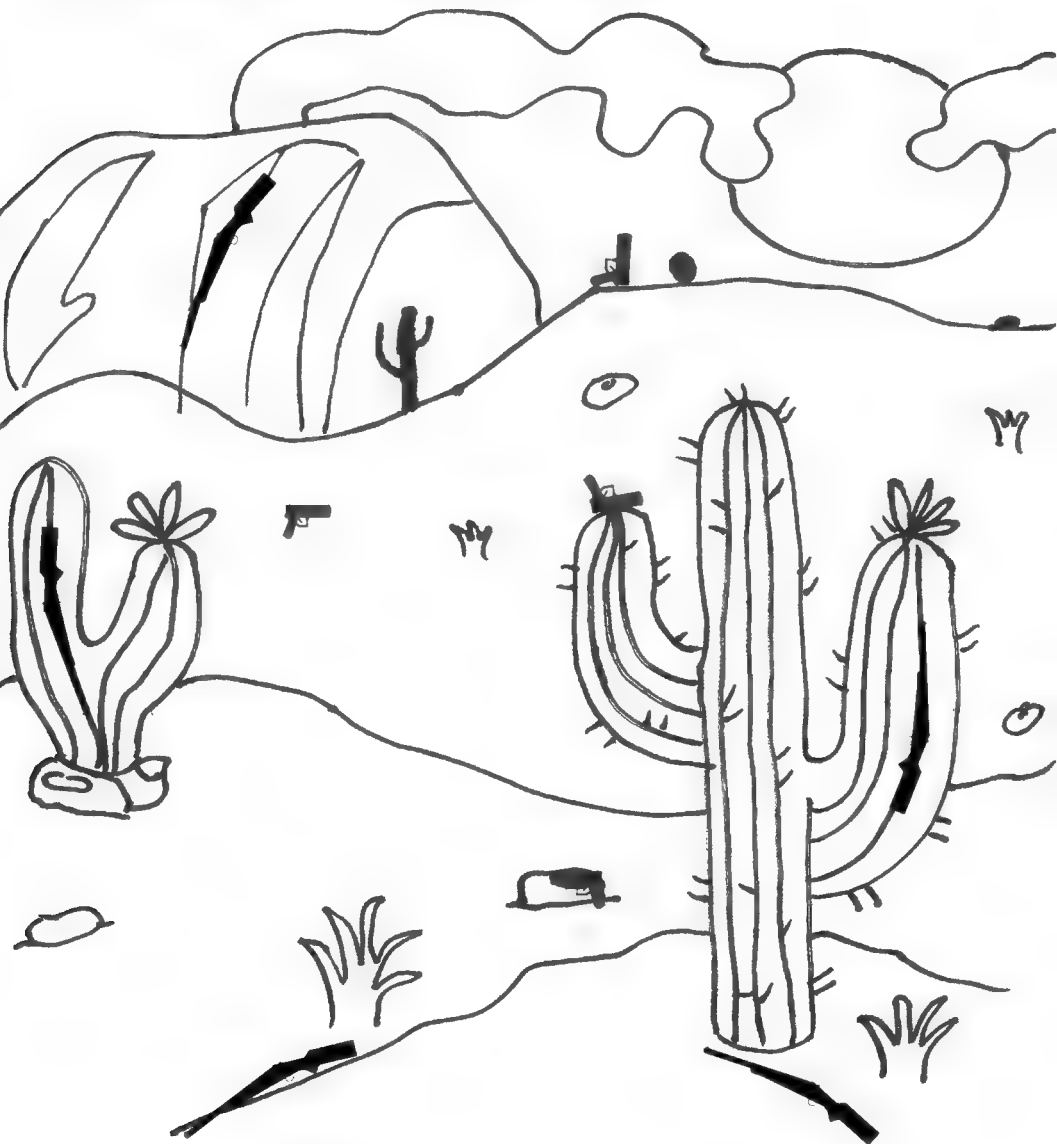
Below are circles representing the 168 people who were killed by McVeigh. How many of them do you think were children?



# Gunwalking

Between 2006 and 2011 the ATF began a series of sting operations to allow guns to be illegally sold in Arizona with the intention of tracking the guns to cartel leaders. The GPS tracking devices in the guns often stopped working after a few days, leading to 2,000 illegally sold guns entering Mexico, many of them still unaccounted for.

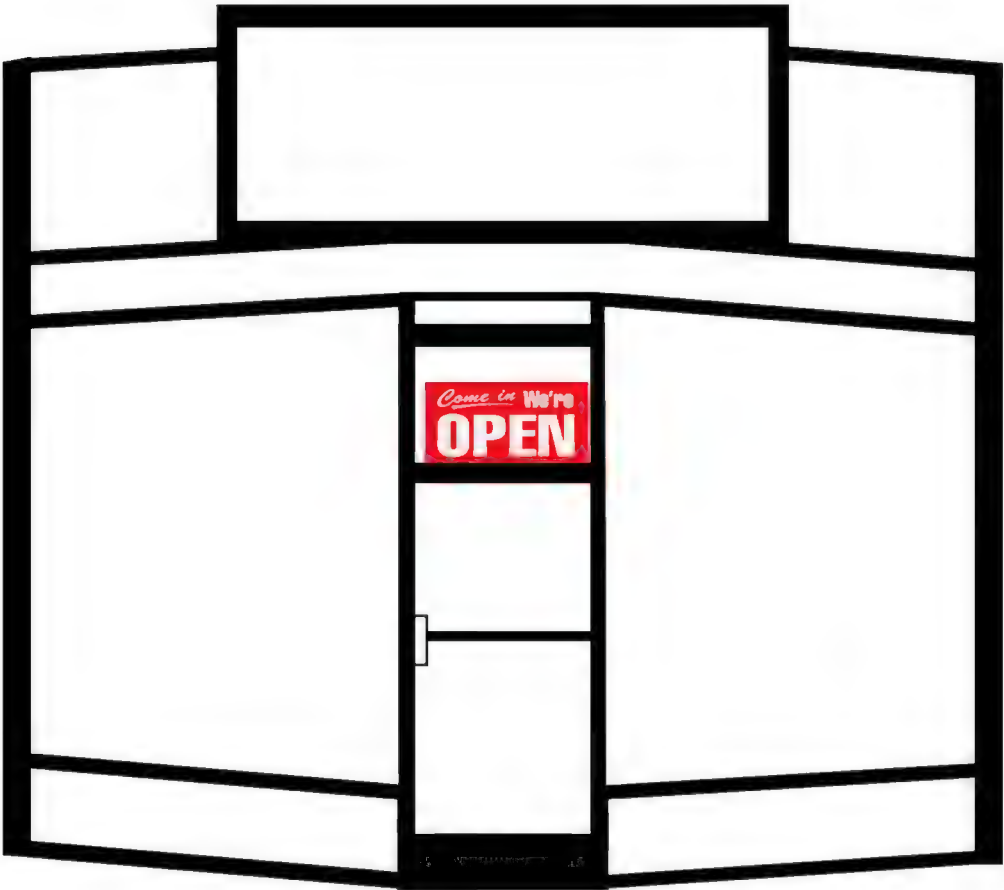
How many guns can you find in the scene below?



# Running a Legitimate Business

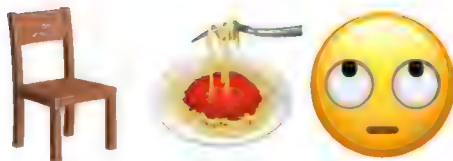
In 2013, the ATF was found to be nationally running fake storefronts. ATF agents sold guns and drug paraphernalia to entrap people into crimes and bought items they knew to be stolen.

Below is a storefront that the ATF have rented out, how would you dress it up as a pawnshop to entice the locals? What would you display in the window? Would you put a fun logo on the sign?



# Missing Firearms

The ATF handles a lot of guns, but sometimes they have a little trouble, even with their own! Can you name the real ways that ATF agents have lost their guns?



# Who's In Charge?

In 2006, the NRA lobbied congress to change the Patriot Act to require that the Senate confirm ATF directors, instead of allowing the President to appoint them. Since then the ATF has been run almost entirely by acting directors.

Can you match the candidate to the president who proposed them, and the reason they didn't get confirmed by the Senate?



Chuck  
Canterbury



Andrew L  
Traver



Michael J  
Sullivan



David  
Chipman



George W  
Bush



Barack  
Obama



Donald  
Trump

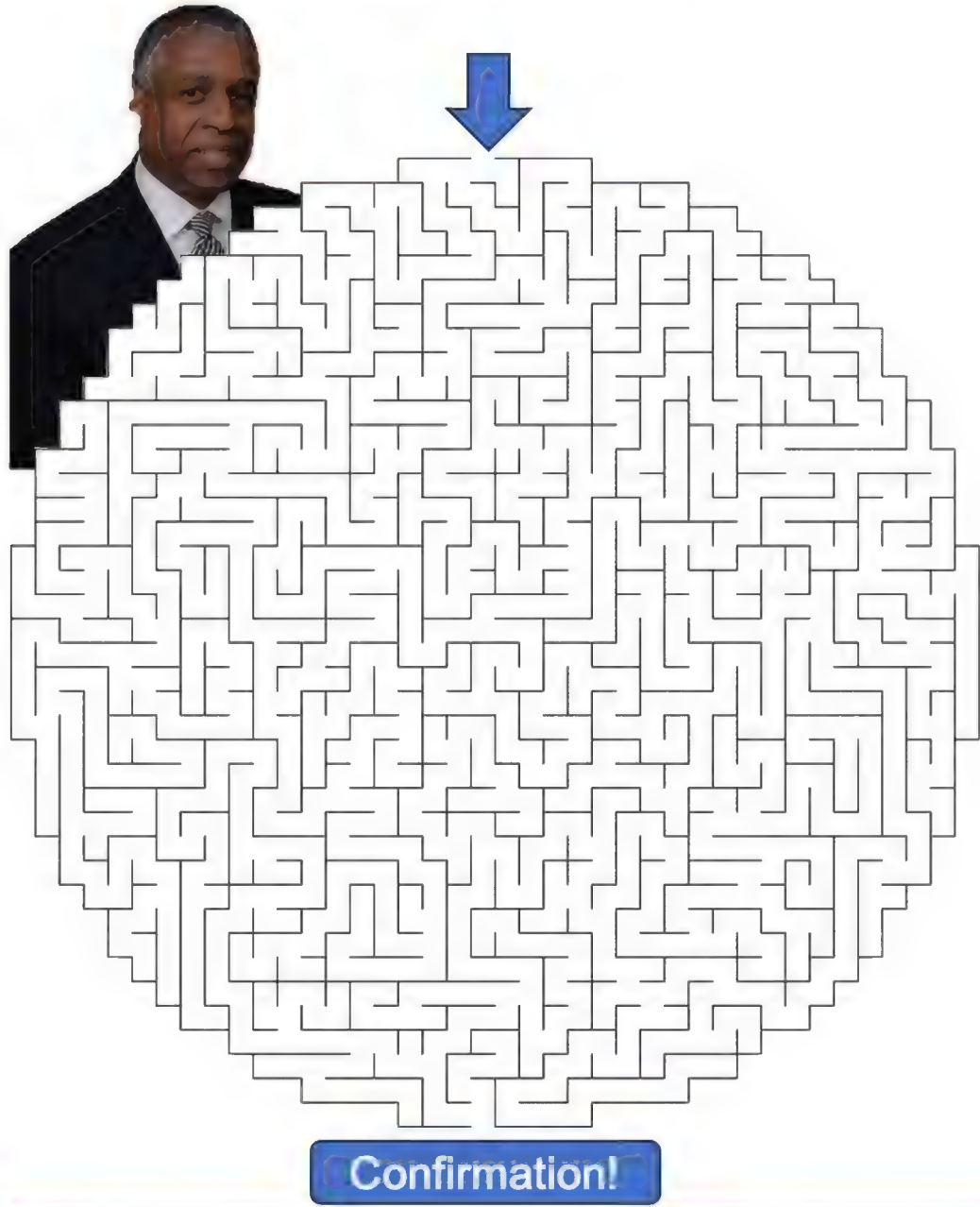


Joe Biden

The NRA did not like him



In 2013, B Todd Jones was confirmed by the Senate as ATF director. Can you help Jones find his way through the maze of NRA-backed Senate opposition to find his way to the ATF?



**Did you know?**

Steve Dettelbach, the current ATF director, was confirmed by the Senate, but using a procedural maneuver, not a floor vote.

## In Conclusion

The ATF is the Jimmy Carter of the agencies outlined in this book. Not good by any objective standard, looks much better by comparison. Also it makes the far right incredibly angry.

In part, I believe this stems from the Bureau's role as a regulatory agency. While it does also serve as an armed wing of an often authoritarian and unaccountable government apparatus, it isn't *exclusively* a law enforcement or surveillance agency (though admittedly after its restructure in 2002, enforcement is now its primary purpose).

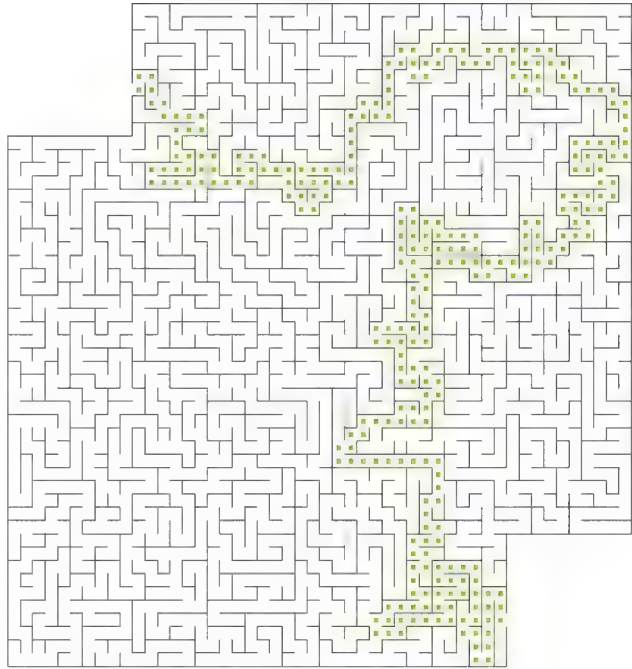
Republicans have effectively hobbled the ATF's ability to regulate and enforce by repeatedly denying it a director. And if the Democrats were interested in actually reigning in the security state, they easily could be doing the same thing to demand accountability from the FBI, CIA and NSA.

But they're not. Because of course they aren't. The powers and resources given to the security state is on a one way ratchet that only goes up. The lack of accountability is the point. That their ubiquity goes unquestioned in the mainstream speaks to their power.

So what's the point of the activity book? Well for one I hope you learned something during your flight/road trip/wait in the doctor's office.

And secondly, I hope that you've begun (or continued) to ask questions. Why are these agencies here? What have they done? And how can we imagine a world without them?

## Answer Key:



## Prohibition

Like the War on Drugs that would follow it, Prohibition was used as a way to criminalize the poor and marginalized; the rich faced very few obstacles to continuing to drink. Hart didn't learn of his younger brothers' criminal activities until reading about them in the paper.

For more:

- Ashley Thronson. 2022. "A Capone in North Dakota" State Historical Society of North Dakota
- Kristen Richard "Xenophobia, Racism and Classism: The Sinister Roots of America's Prohibition" Wine Enthusiast

## Alcohol Tainting

Wood alcohol was used to poison the booze, the liver breaks this down into formaldehyde, and then into formic acid.

Sources:

- Deborah Blum. 2010. *The Poisoner's Handbook*. Penguin
- Deborah Blum. 2010 "The Chemist's War" Slate

## Untouchables

The truths: Eliot Ness and J Edgar Hoover did hate each other, and Ness was the inspiration for Dick Tracy, Ness was only 26, and Carlisle grad William Jennings Gardner, and Carl “Mr. Alcohol Tax” Hambach were all members at one point.

The lies: Ten “Untouchables” were credited with building the case against Capone, but the original squad was six, and it grew as members joined and left. The Untouchables did not arrest Al Capone, Ness and Capone only met once. Ness and the untouchables, were primarily a PR stunt, as Prohibition was intensely unpopular. And after retiring Ness’s marriage fell apart, he developed a drinking problem and he fell for several scams. He died nearly broke, after finalizing his autobiography “the Untouchables”

Sources:

- Max Allan Collins and Brad A. Schwartz. 2018. *Scarface and the Untouchable: Al Capone, Eliot Ness, and the Battle for Chicago* New York: William Morrow.
- Erick Trickey. 2014 “Inside the Intense Rivalry Between Eliot Ness and J. Edgar Hoover” Smithsonian Magazine.

## The Bureau’s Greatest Agents

Cigar salesmen (Moe’s real job before becoming a Prohibition agent), Street car conductors, farmer, football players, grocers, lawyers, librarians, plumbers, opera goers, cowboys, judges, bums, German pickle packers, Polish counts, Hungarian violinists, Yiddish gravediggers, a French maitre d’, an Italian fruit vendors, old Italian women, a Russian fisherman, and more unfortunately Mexican laborers, Chinese laundry workers and on at least one instance, blackface while investigating in Harlem.

Sources:

- Karen Abbott. 2012. Prohibition’s Premier Hooch Hounds. Smithsonian Magazine
- Nathan Miller, 2003. *New World Coming: The 1920s and the Making of Modern America*.
- November 23, 1925, Prohibition: Izzy and Moe. Time Magazine

# Where in the Government is the ATF?

1862 The Office of Internal Revenue is created

1913 Newly created Prohibition Unit

1927 The Prohibition Unit becomes the Bureau of Prohibition

1930 The Bureau of Prohibition is moved to the Department of Justice and its focus expanded to fighting violent crime

1933 The 21st Amendment repeals Prohibition. The Bureau is moved back to the Treasury and renamed the Alcohol Tax Unit (ATU)

1941 The ATU's scope is expanded to include enforcement of firearm regulation

1968 After several high profile gun assassinations including JFK, the ATU is granted wider regulatory authority over firearms and reorganized into the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Division (ATTD)

1972

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) is created under the treasury department.

1992 and 93

The Bureau faces increasing increasing scrutiny after the public mishandling of the Ruby Ridge standoff and Waco siege.

1995

Timothy McVeigh seeks revenge on the ATF in the Oklahoma City bombing.

2003

After 9/11, the ATF is split into two

Source:

- Bryan Schatz. 2016 "Guns and Poses: A Brief History of the ATF" Mother Jones.



## Ruby Ridge

Weaver was a white supremacist, but at the time of the standoff he did not pose an active threat to the public. Moreover, the outsized government reaction to him made him an icon of the militia movement, and therefore more dangerous than he ever would have been on his own.

Source:

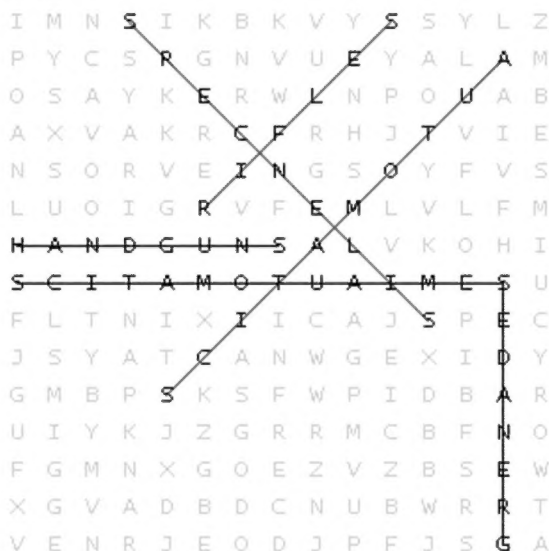
- Garrett Graff. 2023. *Long Shadow: Rise of the American Far Right*. Long Lead.

## Operation Trojan Horse

They also had parts for hundreds more guns and grenades

Source:

- Chris Peacock. 1995. "Weapons Possessed by the Branch Davidians" Department of the Treasury.



## Oklahoma City Bombing

Nineteen children were killed. It was, at the time, the deadliest act of domestic terrorism in U.S. history. McVeigh was executed in 2001. His co-conspirator, Terry Nichols, is currently serving 161 consecutive life sentences at ADX Florence.

Sources

- *Extremism in America: The Oklahoma City Bombing*. Retro Report

## **Gunwalking**

There are nine guns in this picture, which is much fewer than the 1400 that are still unaccounted. Guns related to this program were found at the crime scenes of 150 killings and maimings of Mexican citizens.

Source:

- Todd Schwarzchild and Drew Griffin. 2011. "ATF Loses Track of 1,400 guns in criticized probe"
- Office of the Inspector General. "A Review of ATF's Operation Fast and Furious and Related Matters" 2012

## **Running a Legitimate Business**

Agents also sought out and hired mentally disabled people and pressured them into brokering gun sales and encouraging them to sell to felons in order to arrest them on gun trafficking charges.

At the fake storefront "Squid's Smoke Shop" in Portland, agents suggested that teens get neck tattoos of the shop mascot, a squid smoking a joint, and paid for the teenagers to get the tattoos.

Source:

- John Diedrich and Raquel Rutledge. 2013. "ATF uses rogue tactics in storefront stings across nation" Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

## **Missing Firearms**

The missing guns have been:

Stolen from a government vehicle

Reported by the agent's neighbor who saw it top of their car

Lost a pistol in a restaurant

Left in a briefcase on the Metro

And left in a restaurant a separate, unrelated time

Sources

- Office of the Inspector General. March 2018. Audit of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Controls over Weapons, Munitions, and Explosives.

# Who's In Charge?

Mike Sullivan- Bush

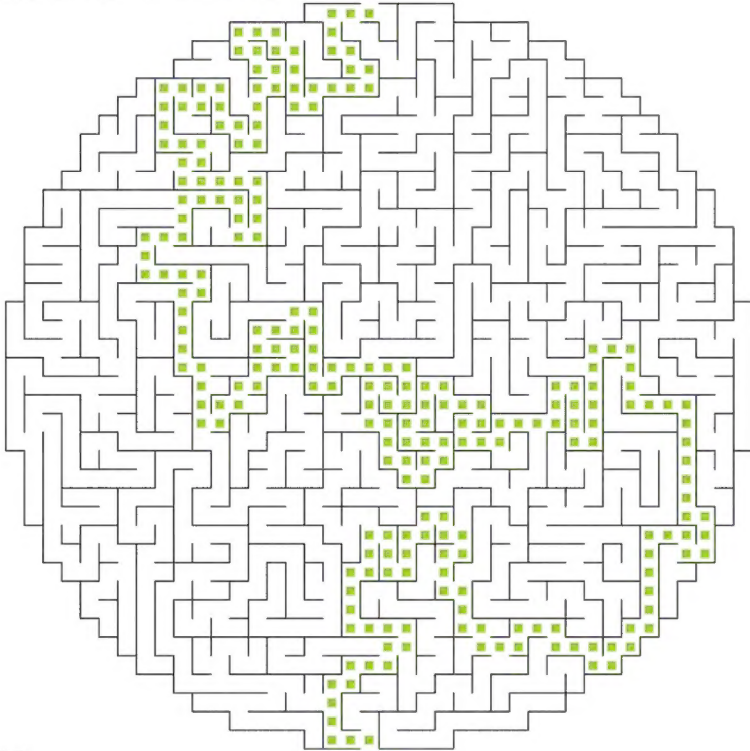
Andrew L Traver- Obama

Chuck Canterbury- Trump

David Chipman- Biden

Guess what? It's all because the NRA didn't like them. Chuck Canterbury was the president of the Fraternal Order of Police and he wasn't pro-gun enough for the NRA

B Todd Jones did find his way through the maze to get confirmed by a vote of 53-42 in 2013.



## Sources

- Josiah Bates. 2021. "Why the Federal Firearms Agency Can't Find a Permanent Director" Time Magazine
- Burgess Everett and Marianne Levine. 2020. "Trump withdraws ATF nominee amid Republican concerns." Politico.



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